

Dear Senators Smith, Waldstreicher and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

I am a resident of District 21 and have lived in Maryland for most of my 70 years. I am a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Annapolis and Anne Arundel County and a Christian who believes in creating the Beloved Community, welcoming the immigrant, and loving the stranger.

I am testifying in support of SB0478, which does three important things:

- Ends government contracts with private prisons
- Requires that the public be informed of future plans for private detention
- Requires local governments to terminate existing agreements to house ICE detainees (IGSAs).

Detaining underdocumented immigrants separates families and often contributes to their impoverishment. Who receives the economic gains? Howard, Frederick and Worcester counties rent their detention space to ICE. They profit by housing fathers and mothers who have not committed crimes, but simply do not have all their immigrant paperwork. That is a civil not a criminal issue. When there is a true alleged criminal violation, then yes, arrest and often detention are appropriate.

Who else profits? Private for-profit prisons. They are motivated by cutting costs — like medical staffing and other contracted staffing. They are also financially motivated to increase the number of detainees. In a system where people equal profit, cost-cutting and overcrowding lead to poor conditions for detainees, most of whom have no criminal background and are being held to await a civil immigration trial.

ICE and private for-profit prisons have a long documented history of unsafe housing conditions, including insufficient medical care. Nationwide we know that Covid-19 rates are four times as high in correctional facilities and the death toll is twice as high as the general population. Human beings who are not being charged with criminal violations should not be put at such risk by being detained.

Our government should not be profiting off the unjust treatment of Maryland residents nor should we be treating people in this way. I supported getting rid of the 287g program and IGSA that previously existed in Anne Arundel County and hope that the Maryland General Assembly can stop these programs across the state.

Shall we put the dream of the Beloved Community above profit or shall we continue to allow state and local law enforcement to help ICE by detaining “the least of these” and destroying families? That choice is up to you. I am encouraging you to vote in support of bill SB0478.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Linda K. Girdner
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